

MMS Fast Facts

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Environmental Studies Program

The Minerals Management Service (MMS), an agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, is responsible for managing the Nation's oil, natural gas, and other energy and mineral resources on the Federal Outer Continental Shelf (OSC) and the collection and accounting of mineral revenues generated from offshore and onshore Federal and Indian lands.

The OCS Lands Act established policy for the management of the OCS oil and natural gas and mineral program. Section 20, authorized the Environmental Studies Program as a means to gather and synthesize environmental, social and economic science information to support decision-making concerning the offshore program and established three general goals for the program:

- assess and manage environmental impacts,
- predict potential impacts on marine life from chronic, low-level pollution or large spills; and
- monitor human, marine, and coastal environments.

Since its inception, the Environmental Studies Program has funded over \$800 million in studies designed to ensure sound stewardship and protection of the ocean environment while developing our nation's offshore energy and mineral resources. These studies have provided significant advances in knowledge regarding marine mammals, deep water currents, and the ecology and significance of the largest artificial reef system in the world created by the oil and gas platforms located in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, these studies have resulted in discoveries such as a new species of polychaete worms, fondly known as "ice worms," that actually live on the outcrops of frozen methane hydrates that occur in deep water areas of the Gulf of Mexico.

The MMS has expanded the scope of the Environmental Studies Program to meet information needs for the management of the OCS Sand and Gravel program, and has begun acquiring information relevant to the OCS Alternative Energy program focusing on renewable energy projects including wind, wave, and ocean currents.

MMS also conducts research in physical oceanography that focuses on understanding and verifying general physical processes and features common to the OCS

MMS engages academia, industry, non-government organizations, Federal, State, and local governments outside entities in the development of a research plan for the Environmental Studies Program. The studies are sponsored through a competitive procurement process, cooperative agreements with State institutions and universities, and interagency agreements with other Federal Agencies. Due to the interest in study results, MMS established the Environmental Studies Program Information System (ESPIS) to provide easy access to completed studies. ESPIS can be accessed through the MMS website at: <https://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/espis/espismaster.asp?appid=1>.

MMS will be sponsoring a workshop December 3-4, 2008, in Williamsburg, Virginia, at the Williamsburg Woodlands Conference Center, on the environmental research needs to support potential Virginia offshore oil and gas activities. The workshop will focus on the existing scientific knowledge base along the Virginia Coast and the information gaps that need to be addressed should a lease sale be held for the Virginia OCS. More information about the workshop can be found on the MMS website at:

<http://www.vims.edu/public/workshops/mmsworkshop/>

Additional information regarding MMS's Environmental Studies Program is available at: <http://www.mms.gov/eppd/sciences/index.htm>.

To find out more, visit the MMS website at <http://www.mrm.mms.gov> for information on the MMS Mineral Revenue Management Program or <http://www.mms.gov/offshore> for information on the Offshore Energy and Minerals Management Program, or call the MMS Office of Congressional Affairs at (202) 208-3502.